

HIGHLIGHTS NEEDLES FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting

December 5-6, 2014

First Solar Stateline Solar Farm

BLM Action: Desert Stateline, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of First Solar Development, Inc. (First Solar) constructing a 300-megawatt (MW) alternating current (AC) solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating project known as the Stateline Solar Farm (Project). The PV generating facility (Solar Farm), the corridor for the Project's 220-kilovolt (kV) generation interconnection (gen-tie) transmission line, and the access road would be located in western Ivanpah Valley, east of Interstate 15 and northeast of the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System project. The project would connect to the Southern California Edison (SCE) regional transmission grid via SCE's Ivanpah Substation.

Contacts: Noel Ludwig, Project Manager
Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Agencies: California Desert District Renewable Energy Action Team and Needles Field Office

Status: BLM has contracted with SWCA Environmental Consultants to provide third party compliance monitoring throughout construction. SWCA and multiple subcontractors provide BLM with daily monitoring reports during construction activities, and BLM personnel including Noel Ludwig make frequent onsite inspections to confirm compliance with the ROW terms and conditions. Full construction has now commenced. BLM is now coordinating the implementation of numerous mitigation measures including tortoise fencing both onsite and off, restoration of previously closed routes of travel and other disturbed areas.

Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System

BLM Action: Solar Partners', LLC have constructed the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System, a concentrated solar electrical generating facility capable of generating 370 megawatts (MW) of renewable power. The project is located in the Ivanpah Valley, southwest of Primm, Nevada, and consist of three power plants, Ivanpah 1, Ivanpah 2 and Ivanpah 3. Shared facilities include a substation and natural gas pipeline. The three independent power plants and shared substation are co-located on approximately 3,671 acres of Bureau administered public land.

Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Status: NEFO continues to work with NRG to complete a few mitigation projects and monitor operational compliance. Monitoring of desert tortoise, impacts to avian species, and glare continue as well.

Camp Iron Mtn

BLM Action: The NEFO is considering opportunities to further protection and interpretation of the Camp Iron site. Camp Iron Mtn was one of the Divisional Camps at the Desert Training Center where our troops trained during WWII. Measures could include Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, development of interpretive facilities, brochures, web based education materials, interpretive walks etc.

Agencies: BLM Needles Field Office

Contact: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: There is an ACEC Management plan that was prepared for Camp Iron Mtn in 1984. Additionally, there is a wealth of information stored in the Needles Field Office from an outreach campaign that culminated in hundreds of letters from soldiers that trained at the Desert Training Center. NEFO staff is reviewing those materials and will either update the Camp Iron Mtn ACEC plan or tier off of it to enhance protection and interpretation of the site.

The NEFO is also working with the BLMs National Operations Center (NOC) to coordinate a test inventory flight of the camp by the BLM Unmanned Aircraft. The objective is to achieve detailed mapping of the site through this new technology that will be suitable to support a National Register Listing Nomination.

Abandoned Mine Lands

BLM Action: The NEFO is actively pursuing inventories, prioritization and closures of abandoned mines that may present a public safety hazard.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office with support from the California Desert District and California Department of Conservation

Contact: Sterling White, CDD AML
Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: Bat surveys and other natural and cultural resource surveys are being conducted as funds and staffing allow for the development of a NEPA document and a possible contract for the closures. Much of the inventory work and bat surveys are accomplished by contractors, staff, and volunteers.

Manchester Quarry Closure

BLM Action: The NEFO is cooperating with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) on a project to permanently close the Manchester Quarry. The quarry is located north of Needles CA, within the Dead Mountains Wilderness.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office; Bureau Of Reclamation, Yuma

Contact: Bill Webster, Needles Field Office Realty Specialist
Mike Ahrens, Needles Field Office Manager

Status: BOR contractors have completed restoration of the mine site and access road. NEFO will provide vertical mulching and restoration of the obliterated access route through the use of the "WildCorp" crew, a SCA crew of interns provided to CDD to complete restoration and other wilderness related projects in the near future.

Castle Mountain Mine Re-opening

BLM Action: The NEFO has been contacted by Castle Mountain Mining Company (CMMC) about the possibility of re-opening the Castle Mountain Gold Mine. The mine was operated by the Viceroy Mining Company from approximately 1991 through 2001.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Contact: Peter Godfrey, CDD Geologists
Mike Ahrens, Needles Field Office Manager

Status: The NEFO has been in informal consultation with the CMMC since December 2013. CMMC has indicated that they do want to pursue re-opening the mine and that we can anticipate a proposed Plan of Operations (POO) soon. Indications are that the proposed POO will be to initiate operations within the previously authorized foot print of the mine. The NEFO has assembled a small team to offer an initial review of the CMMC proposal and the proposed POO when it is released, and to conduct any necessary environmental review and authorization.

BLM was informed in early November that CMMC would require additional time to develop their proposed POO due to some new metallurgical survey information that they have received.

Partnerships

Chicago Botanical Garden – The NEFO host an intern in support of the Seeds of Success program. The program collects native plant seeds which are stored for use in future restoration projects.

Amargosa Conservancy - The NFO and the Amargosa Conservancy (AC) are working together in protective and conservation efforts at Crystal Springs, Wildhorse Spring, and Horse Thief Springs in the Kingston Range. AC has provided cleanup efforts and are “eyes and ears” for the field office in this remote area.

California Trail Users Coalition - The NFO has entered into an agreement with the California Trail Users Coalition (CTUC) to extend their successful map series to include the NFO. This includes the development of a three map series covering our jurisdiction. The maps are available through the CTUC distribution network and at the NFO. The project is funded through a grant from the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division.

All three maps covering the Needles Field Office jurisdiction have been completed and are now available through the CTUC, and the Needles Field Office. The NFO has also initiated a distribution network utilizing local RV Resorts along the Colorado River.

All maps use a comprehensive route network, developed by staff based on the designated open route system for the map series. This network highlights long distance touring opportunities and access to recreational points of interest. The routes are marked; those with assigned names have been marked with stickers showing the names and numbers that correspond to labels on the maps.

Great Basin Institute – The NFO has entered into an agreement with the Great Basin Institute to provide two interns in support of an OHMVR Grant funded Invasive and Sensitive plant inventory project. The three year project will focus on invasive and sensitive plant species adjacent to our system of roads and trails.

Native American Lands Conservancy (NALC) – The NEFO is partnering with the NALC to support the management of the Old Woman Mtn. Wilderness and the adjacent NALC Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The NEFO supported the NALC in the development of an OHMVR restoration grant to provide restoration and barriers along the borders of the Old Woman Mtn Wilderness and the Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The grant will be administered by the NALC.

Other accomplishments of Note

BLM Action: The NFO staff provided the attached document, **Bench Marking Achievements** as a list of recent accomplishments in support of the office during a recent administrative program audit. I have included it below for your reference.

Bench Marking Achievements

- The Needles Field Office (NFO) strives to utilize what they have to maximum extent possible. In doing so we have established a working relationship with the NPS for co-locating personnel when practical. As a result there is one, sometimes two, NPS employees who work out of the Needles Filed Office and help with addressing customer concerns/inquiries. We also have a Fire unit housed inside the Mohave National Preserve at a NPS facility near Hole in the Wall.

- Development of the Route 66 rest area at the 5 mile exit off of Interstate 40. The Interpretive kiosk highlights points of interests about the history of the communities along Route 66, where travelers can experience the nostalgia of the Mother Road. The kiosk map also is a guide to discovering the BLM's National Conservation Lands and other public lands adjacent to Route 66 between Needles and Victorville, California. From the kiosk viewpoint, visitors can see some of these spectacular National Conservation Lands/wilderness areas that provide visitors opportunities to discover and experience the beauty and solitude of some of the most spectacular landscapes in the Mojave Desert.
- The NFO is working in a collaborative effort with Solar Partners to Develop an Interpretive Center at the Ivanpah Dry Lake. The Interpretive center will provide visitors with educational kiosks emphasizing points of interest regarding the Dry Lake Bed and nearby solar initiative while they enjoy wind sailing across the lake bed.
- The NFO sent two individuals to Palm Springs Field Office to assist them with grant close out and train on grant management processes.
- The NFO secured external funding from an OHV grant to do three years of botanical monitoring along Needles BLM open routes of travel. Two Research Associates from the Great Basin Institute are using historic records of sensitive plant populations to survey for, and to establish the phenology and distribution of sensitive plant populations within the NFO. More than 20 new occurrences of sensitive plant species have been recorded since the project started two months ago. Invasive plant surveys along open routes are also being conducted to establish when and where noxious weeds are growing.
- A research grant proposal is currently being developed by the Needles Natural Resource Specialist and the USGS. The goal of the proposed grant is to learn more about when tortoises are active throughout the year so that management can make better decisions about how to protect the threatened desert tortoise while still managing the land for multiple uses.
- The Needles BLM is coordinating with the Las Vegas BLM and other California BLM field offices to implement a USGS proposed common garden study across the Mojave Desert. This study will better inform restoration practices, especially with respect to

restoring native plant communities with locally adapted seed. Results from this study will drive changes in the way the BLM and contractors conduct restoration across the western United States.

- A collaborative grant, submitted with the USFS, is allowing the Needles BLM to conduct research on Ivanpah Dry Lake, which is a globally acclaimed recreation area in the Needles Field Office. Soil moisture monitoring equipment will be installed so that the BLM can let the public know the lakebed is closed to prevent damage to the smooth surface of the lake bed. This will facilitate both resource protection and the public's enjoyment and convenient access to the lakebed.
- The Needles Natural Resource Specialist is in the Pathways program, working on a master's degree in forestry at Northern Arizona University. Her graduate work, supported by the BLM, is focused on creating a better classification system for desert dry wash woodland communities, composed of, various, palo verde, mesquite, acacia, smoketree, and desert willow trees. These xeroriparian areas have higher biodiversity than surrounding areas and serve as very important wildlife corridors, particularly to birds, and yet are much understudied. This project will draw attention to the important resource values these systems have, the underlying diversity represented by these vegetation communities, and will create a better framework for restoration of these systems after human mediated disturbances.
- Volunteers are frequently utilized in the NFO. One of the most active volunteers is a 70-something year old retired physician who loves to backpack. This volunteer spends his winters planning and leading backpacking trips through Needles BLM wilderness areas, visiting and monitoring sensitive resources including wildlife species (such as the bighorn sheep, which have been dying of pneumonia), vegetation, trespasses into wilderness, and important water sources, both natural and artificial.
- NFO partnered with USDA, San Bernardino National Forest, the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and the Nextera Tribal Working Group to provide supplies, logistics data public land access, and field support to accomplish training 21 individuals from various Tribes in the field of cultural resources management, archaeological survey, field methods and site recordation. The training took place on public land managed by the Needles Field Office and Chemehuevi Indian Reservation Lands from Sunday, October 19 through Friday October 24, 2014.

- In accordance with “Measuring Attributes of Wilderness Characteristic, Implementation Guide 5.1”, BLM cultural staff completed an intensive review of site records, ethnographic maps and historic maps for all 18 wilderness areas managed by NFO to establish baseline data associated with site condition. Approximately 200 sites have been initially selected, and will be monitored over the long term to understand what changes take place in the wilderness.
- NFO finalized all flight plans and methods with the NOC in order to execute the DOI-BLM Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) plan to record Iron Mountain Divisional Camp of the Desert Training Center. To do so will accomplish one of the tasks recommended in the 1984 IRON MOUNTAIN CAMP ACEC PLAN, and the data will also be used to formally record portions of the site. Recordation methods will also be completed through traditional means and the two methods will be compared and a cost benefit analysis prepared in order to assess the overall value of recording landscape-scale sites using the UAS. The flight will take place in late 2014 or early 2015, as we currently await approval from the FAA.
- Provide digital and hard copy data and maps to the CASO that will be added to the Discover the Desert Website. Currently completing the review and scanning letters soldiers wrote and sent to the Needles field office in response to a National campaign seeking information from any veterans of the DTC.
- Work with CDD and Palm Springs archaeologists developing a poster and presentation regarding the challenges and rewards recording large archeological sites or districts. Present methods and examples that are consistent with the landscape-scale and planning approach promoted by Secretary Jewell. The presentation will be given at the 2015 Society for CA Archaeology conference in March.
- Continue assignments and managing 21 site stewards, of which 15 are from the Fort Mojave Tribe. Continue to offer additional training as both stewards and BLM volunteers.